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STUDY OF HIZEN-TO

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## Hizento: The Tadayoshi School

### The Province of Hizen

Hizen Province, ruled by the Nabeshima<sup>1</sup> clan, was the center of much attention during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This was due to the fact that the greatest volume of foreign trade, and thus the greatest impact of foreign influence, came ashore at Nagasaki, the great port city of western Hizen. European fashions, habits, tastes and religion became very much in vogue. The style that derived from European influences is remembered best by the term "Namban," meaning "Southern Barbarian."<sup>2</sup> Namban styles had a tremendous impact not only on couture, but also painting, printmaking and the decorative arts, including kodo-gu and tsuba. Christianity was among the first things to be imported by the Japanese through the Jesuits.<sup>3</sup> Working under the sponsorship of the Portuguese, the priests of the Society of Jesus, and later the Franciscans, would find many converts in Kyushu.<sup>4</sup> The architecture of Nagasaki became a testament to their efforts with many churches being built and the trade was dominated by Europeans.

Not all foreigners were enthusiastic about the rise of Catholicism in Japan, however. William Adams,<sup>5</sup> an English pilot who had been shipwrecked just before Sekigahara, had become a trusted retainer of the retired Shogun, Ieyasu.<sup>6</sup> Having fought with Drake against the Armada in 1588, he was less than supportive of the tireless efforts of the missionary fathers. Some say that it was his influence that made Ieyasu see the church as a hidden threat, possibly an agent of Spanish conquest as it had been elsewhere. Of course, as a Protestant, Adams was considered a heretic by the Roman Catholic missionaries. At any rate, and by whatever means, the Bakufu did order the mass crucifixion of 50 European and Japanese priests in 1622, after eight years of official persecution.

With the ban on Christianity, the Portuguese were held in great suspicion and were eventually expelled and denied future entry to Japan. The English pilot, Adams, had opened a trading post for English concerns in Hirado in Northern Hizen. The English factory in Hirado closed in 1623, only three years after Adams' death in 1620. The competition with the Dutch had proven to be too much.

The last gasp of Japanese Christendom was snuffed out during the Shimabara Rebellion<sup>7</sup> of 1638. The Shimabara fortress, located in Southern Hizen, had been occupied by a small force of Christians, samurai and commoners, who had resolved to make a stand there. Their defeat was accomplished, some say, with the help of ordnance mounted on a Dutch merchantman.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after this, Japan closed its doors to the world. Only the Dutch remained and only in a very marginal way, restricted to a small island in Nagasaki harbour. This became the status quo until the arrival of Matthew Perry, two hundred years later.<sup>9</sup>



Nagasaki, as the center of "Namban" culture and foreign trade, fell into rapid decline. At the same time a new star was rising in Saga, in eastern Hizen. Saga City was the capital of the Nabeshima Clan. Saga was also the home of a group of swordsmiths that had been founded by a native of Hizen and former student of Umetada Myoju, the founder of the Shin-To style of swordmaking. The descendants and followers of this first Tadayoshi (Musashi Daijo Tadahiro in later years) comprised the Hizen-To, one of the three leading schools of the Shinto period, along with the Edo-Shinto and Osaka-Shinto schools.

### Judging Hizento

#### Sugata (Shape)

Hizento are renowned for their understated quality and feeling of elegance. Most Hizento were made in Katana length in shinogi-zukuri form. Wakizashi, though less plentiful, are also made in shinogi-zukuri. Tanto, which are made in Hira-zukuri form, are rare. Ko-wakizashi are the least common of all. Unusual shapes, i.e., Katakiri, O-kissaki, etc., often seen in products of the Horikawa and Shimosaka schools during Keicho period, are nearly unheard of in the Hizen School. Also atypical of the products of Hizen is the "Kanbun Shape" popular during the Shinto period in the works of Osaka and Edo. Curve is Torii-zori with the deepest part in the middle of the blade. Kissaki size is for the most part medium. All in all, the shape of Hizen-to can be best described as average in terms of size, proportion and curve. Musashi Daijo Tadahiro, Mutsu no Kami Tadayoshi and 8-Dai Tadayoshi are said to have made their blades with wider haba than Omi Daijo Tadahiro, whose blades were more slender.

#### Jitetsu (Grain)

Typical jitetsu on Hizento is Ko-mokume and it is very tightly forged. Very few will exhibit O-itame hada. All works exhibit plenty of ji-nie which is evenly distributed across the ji. Many fanciful names have been developed to describe the texture of the ji of Hizento. Terms such as "Chirimen-hada" (crepe silk grain), "Nuka-hada" (rice-bran grain) and "Nashiji-hada" (pear skin grain or pear fruit grain) were used to describe the beauty of the surface of the ji-steel of Hizento. Another characteristic of Hizento is that very often the skin steel (jitetsu) is made very thin. This results in shin-tetsu (core steel) appearing as dark spots in the ji after relatively few polishes.

Of all members of the Tadayoshi school, Mutsu no Kami Tadayoshi (Tadayoshi III) is said to have made the most beautiful jitetsu.



### Hamon (Edge Pattern)

Typical hamon shapes are:

- a. Chu-suguba (medium straight)
- b. Suguba-hotsure (straight frayed)
- c. Sugu-notare-ba (straight undulating)
- d. Choji-midare (uneven cloves)
- e. Gunome-midare (uneven pointed)
- f. Omidare (large uneven)

Atypical hamon shapes:

- a. Tobiyaki (tempered spots in the ji)
- b. Muneyaki (tempered steel along the mune)
- c. Hitatsura (all-over temper)

The hamon is based in ko-nie with a bright and dense nioiguchi. The nioiguchi, which is also rather even in width, is more compact on the ji side than on the ha side. That is, the grains of nioi are more dense at the top of the hamon, and fall away toward the ha. The base of the hamon usually starts immediately above the ha-machi. Careful examination of this characteristic is important. Sometimes in polishing, stones will be used to make the hamon appear to begin below the ha-machi. A very close look will show the point of origin of the hamon to be right at the ha-machi. (See Figure 6.)

### Boshi (Tempered Pattern at the Tip)

Typical shapes:

- a. Ko-maru (small rounded)
- b. Midare-komi (uneven)
- c. Hakkikake (swept or brushed)

Most common is a suguha, parallel to the edge of the kissaki, ending in ko-maru with a turnback (kaeri). Nie is typically dense. Nidai Tadahiro made his boshi noticeably inferior to Shodai's, with the kaeri ending down further, next to the mitsugashira.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

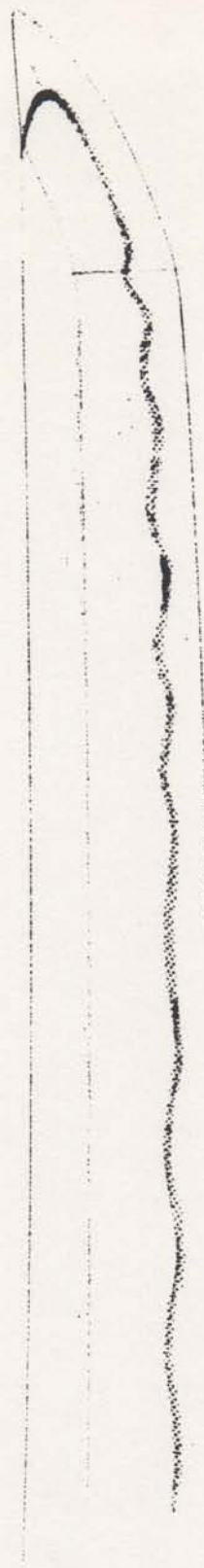


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

- Fig. 1 Gunome-midare (Tadayoshi I)  
 Fig. 2 Omidare (Masahiro II)  
 Fig. 3 Sugu-notareba (Tadayoshi I)  
 Fig. 4 Suguha-hotsureba (Tadayoshi school)





Fig. 5

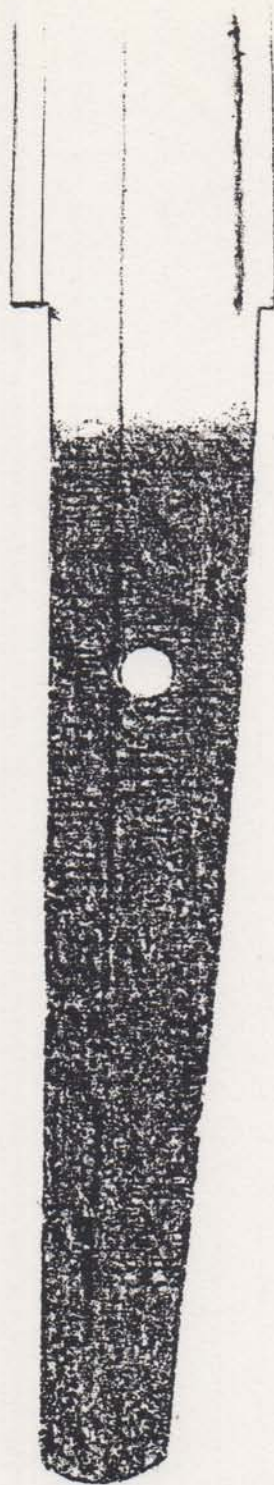


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

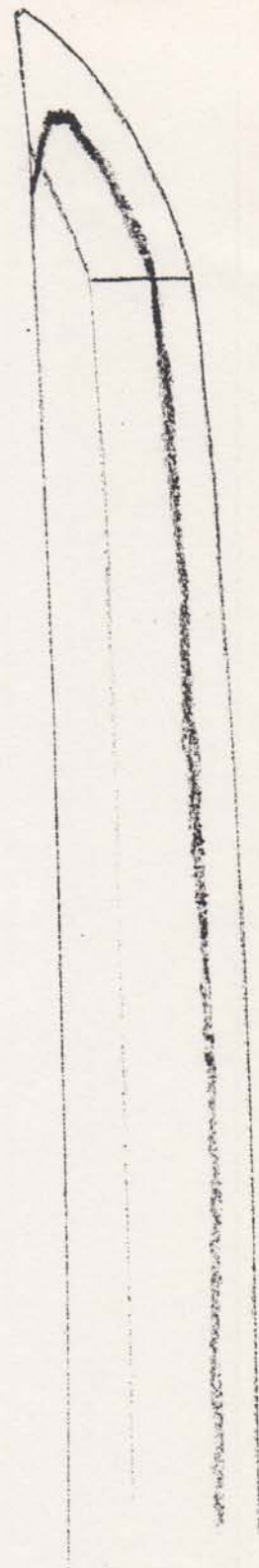


Fig. 8

- Fig. 5 Choji-midare (Masahiro I)  
 Fig. 6 Hizen Hamon-moto (base detail)  
 Fig. 7 Tadayoshi II Boshi  
 Fig. 8 Naka-suguha (Tadayoshi)



### Nakago (Tang)

Most are made with kaku-mune (flat back plane) and end in either kuri-jiri (chestnut shape), Kengyo-jiri (ken sword point), or Iriyamagata (uneven V-shape).

Typical filemarks are Kiri (horizontal), Katte-sagari (slanting down slightly on the right) or Sujikai (slanting distinctly down on the right). Most generations of the Tadayoshi line used Kiri-yasurime. First generation made his kiri with a very slight left-hand upturn, if it was not perfectly horizontal. Third generation made his kiri with a slight right-hand upturn.

File makrs on the base of the nakago-jiri were made horizontally by members of the main Tadayoshi line.

Shodai Tadayoshi made the nakago on swords which were made by his own hand rather narrow, but noticeably thick (niku). This characteristic is not to be found on Dai-mei or Dai-saku examples. (Swords made by students or assistants with the approval of the master.)

### Mei (Signature)

The swordsmiths of Hizen were among the most popular and prolific in Japan's history. As a result, forgeries are also plentiful.

Most signatures are Naga-mei (long signatures). Very few two-character signatures are to be found. An important characteristic of Hizen Swords made in katana length is that they are typically signed on the Hakiomote (tachi-mei). Wakizashi and Tanto are signed on the Sashiomote (katana-mei).

The so-called "Go-ji-mei" (five-character signature) "Hizen no Kuni Tadayoshi" (Tadayoshi of Hizen Province) was used by the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and eighth generations of the Tadayoshi line. This is the most difficult signature to judge for authenticity and the most widely faked. The signatures of the eighth and ninth Tadayoshi are the most commonly faked of all Tadayoshi signatures, the majority of the forgeries being Gendaito (of modern manufacture). The reason that there exist so many forgeries of Hizen to attest to the popularity that they enjoyed. Many swords were ordered by the Nabeshima clan, to be distributed as gifts to Bakufu (Tokugawa government) dignitaries in Edo and elsewhere. The fame of the Tadayoshi group was such that swords were ordered from all over Japan and from the capital, where they became gifts to foreign officials visiting the Shogun's court.



Two Hizen smiths are known to have included special remarks in their mei. Tosa no Kami Tadayoshi indicated his use of namban tetsu (imported steel; Southern Barbarian steel). Dewa no Kami Yukihiro indicated that he used "Orandu kitae" or specifically steel obtained from the Dutch. "Orandu" is the Japanese reading of Holland.

### Notes on Judging Signatures

Hi

肥

The first character used to write "Hizen," the character "Hi" (Fig. I) was written by Shodai Tadayoshi in several ways.

Figure I-A represents the right-hand radical of "Hi" cut by Tadayoshi after he assumed the name "Musashi Daijo Tadahiro." Note the single downstroke in the box area on top.

Figure I-B represents the signing habit of Shodai Tadayoshi's Goji-me. Note the double downstrokes.

Both Ise Daijo Yoshihiro and Hariama Tadakuni cut the character as illustrated in I-A. Nidai Tadahiro used I-B. Hirosada cut the kanji both ways.

Nidai Tadahiro had a particular way of cutting the bottom horizontal stroke from left to right. (See Figure I-C.) This way of carving this particular stroke was used also by Yoshinobu, Masahiro and Yukihiro. It is known as a "secret chisel-mark." Other smiths of the Tadayoshi school carved this stroke from right to left. (See Figure I-d.)

Second Generation Tadahiro changed the way he carved the "tsuki" radical in the character "Hi" after July of 1642 by curving in deeply the downstroke on the right side. (See Figure I-e.)



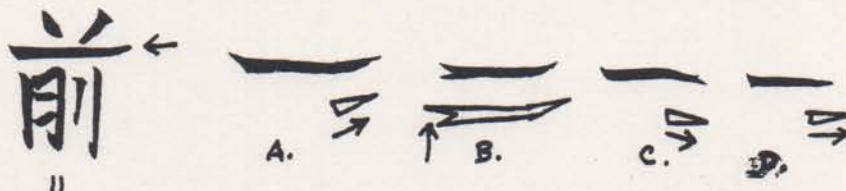
Zen

前

The horizontal cross stroke in the "zen" kanji of "Hizen" and other characters deserves some study. (See Figure II.)

Shodai Tadayoshi, when carving his own signature, ends the stroke with a slight upturn to the right. (See Figure II-A.) When the name is a Dai-me (signature carved by a student or

apprentice with the approval of the master), the left end of the cross stroke will be forked. (See Figure II-B.) The third Tadayoshi ended this cross-stroke by turning it down on the right. (See Figure II-C.) The sixth Tadayoshi cut the stroke with no up or down turn, but straight across. (See Figure II-D.)



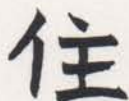
Kuni



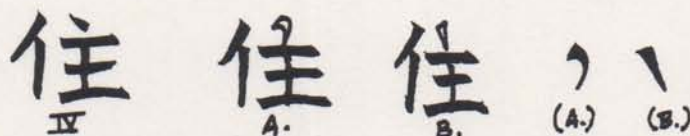
In the "Kuni" character (Figure III), Shodai Tadayoshi carved the kanji in an old style, like that used by the Enju school of Higo and Nobukuni of Yamashiro. (See Figure III-A.) Nadai Tadahiro made the kanji in the conventional manner. (See Figure III-B.) Shodai Yukihiro, like shodai Tadayoshi, cut the Kuni character (III-C) in the old-fashioned manner. Nidai Yukihiro followed suit, with one notable deviation. The lowest of the three strokes in the left side of the box points up rather than to the left, as does shodai's. (Figure III-D)



Ju



In the kanji "ju" (Figure IV), Shodai Tadayoshi's top stroke on the right hand radical is curved. (Figure IV-A) This is called "Mikazuki" or "new moon." When the mei was cut by an apprentice (dai-mei), the top stroke will be like Figure IV-B.





Fuji

藤

In the "Fuji" character used in "Fujiwara," the Shodai Tadayoshi cut three horizontal strokes rather than the normal two in the right-hand radical of the kanji. (See Figure V-A.) Nidai Tadayoshi cut the character with two strokes, which is the conventional form of the character. (Figure V-B)

藤  
V

泰  
A.

泰  
B.

A. ≡  
3 STROKES

B. ≡  
2 STROKES

Wara

原

The character "Wara" (from Fujiwara) was cut by Nidai Tadayoshi with a right-angle added to the last stroke. (Figure VI-A) He made this change after July 1642.

原  
VI

原—L  
A.

Tada

忠

In the "Tada" character, Shodai Tadayoshi cut the three strokes illustrated pointing at each other in a group. (Figure VII-A) Sixth generation Tadayoshi cut the bottom horizontal stroke of "Tada" from right to left. (See Figure VII-B.)

忠  
VII

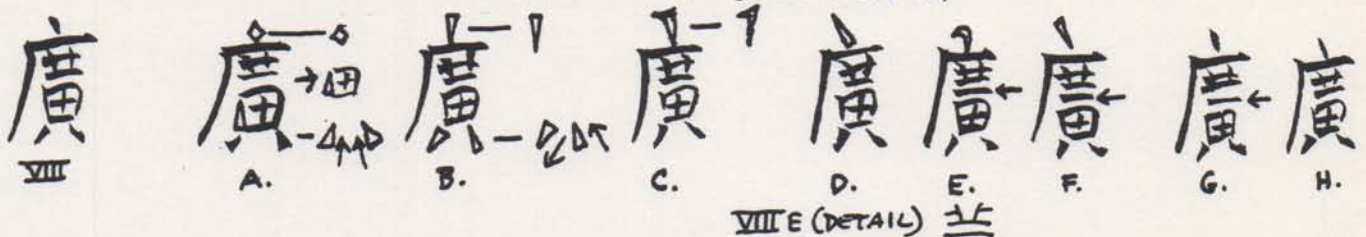
忠 ← → 忠 ← → 忠 ← →

Hiro

廣

In "Hiro," shodai Tadayoshi's top stroke is formed as a diamond, with the bottom two strokes being cut pointing up. (Figure VIII-A) Also note the left hand stroke of the "Ta" radical in Hiro. It is pointing up, rather than down which would be normal. (Figure VIII-A) Nidai Tadahiro cut his top stroke straight down and cut the two bottom strokes with the right one pointing up, the left down. (Figure VIII-B) In Kanei 11, (1635) August, he began to cut the top stroke with a little tail pointing to the left. (Figure VIII-C)

In the Masahiro line, the shodai (Kawachi Daijo Masahiro) cut his top stroke pointing up to the left. The rest of the kanji is normal in form. (Figure VIII-D) Nidai (Kawachi no Kami) Masahiro cut his top stroke like the "Mikazuki." He made more strokes to carve the configuration above the "Ta" radical, including an extra horizontal stroke. (See Figures VIII-E and VIII-F detail.) The third Masahiro signed Masanaga and had the title "Bitchu Daijo." The fourth Masahiro (Kawachi no Kami) used a down-pointing top stroke and an extra horizontal above "Ta" in his "Hiro." (Figure VIII-F) In the Yukihiro line, the Shodai used an extra stroke above the "Ta" radical (Figure VIII-G), while the Nidai did not. (Figure VIII-H)



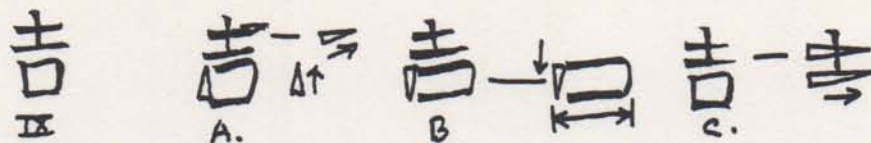
Yoshi

吉

In the character "Yoshi," Shodai Tadayoshi cut the left stroke of the "guchi" radical, which is shaped like a box, points up. This is consistent with the way that "Ta" is cut in "Hiro." The cross strokes which form the horizontals on the top of the kanji end with a slight upturn with the last chiselmark. (Figure IX-A)



The fourth Tadayoshi made the left hand stroke of the "Guchi" radical pointing down. Also, the whole box-shape seems rather more elongated than normal. (Figure IX-B) The sixth Tadayoshi made the top horizontal strokes perfectly horizontal, turning neither up nor down. (See Figure IX-C)



GENEOLOGY

Mainline Tadayoshi Family

Tadayoshi I 1571-1633

Musashi Daijo Fujiwara Tadahiro

Student of Umetada Myoju, Shinto founder



Tadayoshi II 1614-1693

Omi Daijo Fujiwara Tadahiro.

Never signed "Tadayoshi" always signed "Tadahiro"



Tadayoshi III 1637-1687

Received "Mutsu no Daijo" in 1660 and

"Mutsu no Kami" in 1661.

Considered equal in quality to shodai. Best jitetsu



Tadayoshi IV 1668-1747

Omi Daijo



Tadayoshi V 1695-1775

Omi no Kami



Tadayoshi VI 1735-1815

Omi no Kami



Tadayoshi VII 1770-1816

Omi no Daijo



Tadayoshi VIII 1800-1859

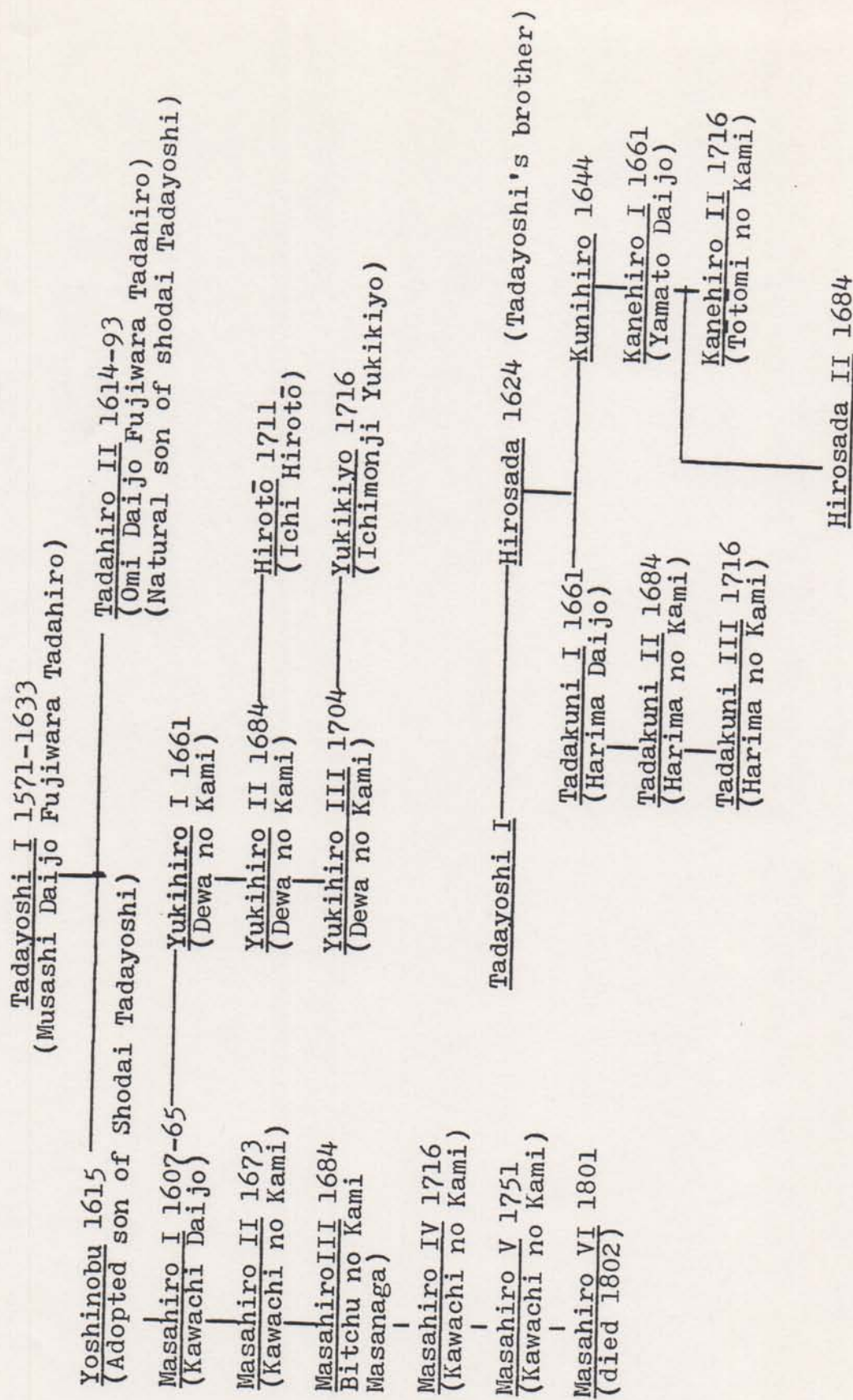
No title. Considered to be of high quality. Best following Shodai and Sandai. Signed mostly with the "goji-mei." Many forgeries exist of his work.



Tadayoshi IX 1831-1880

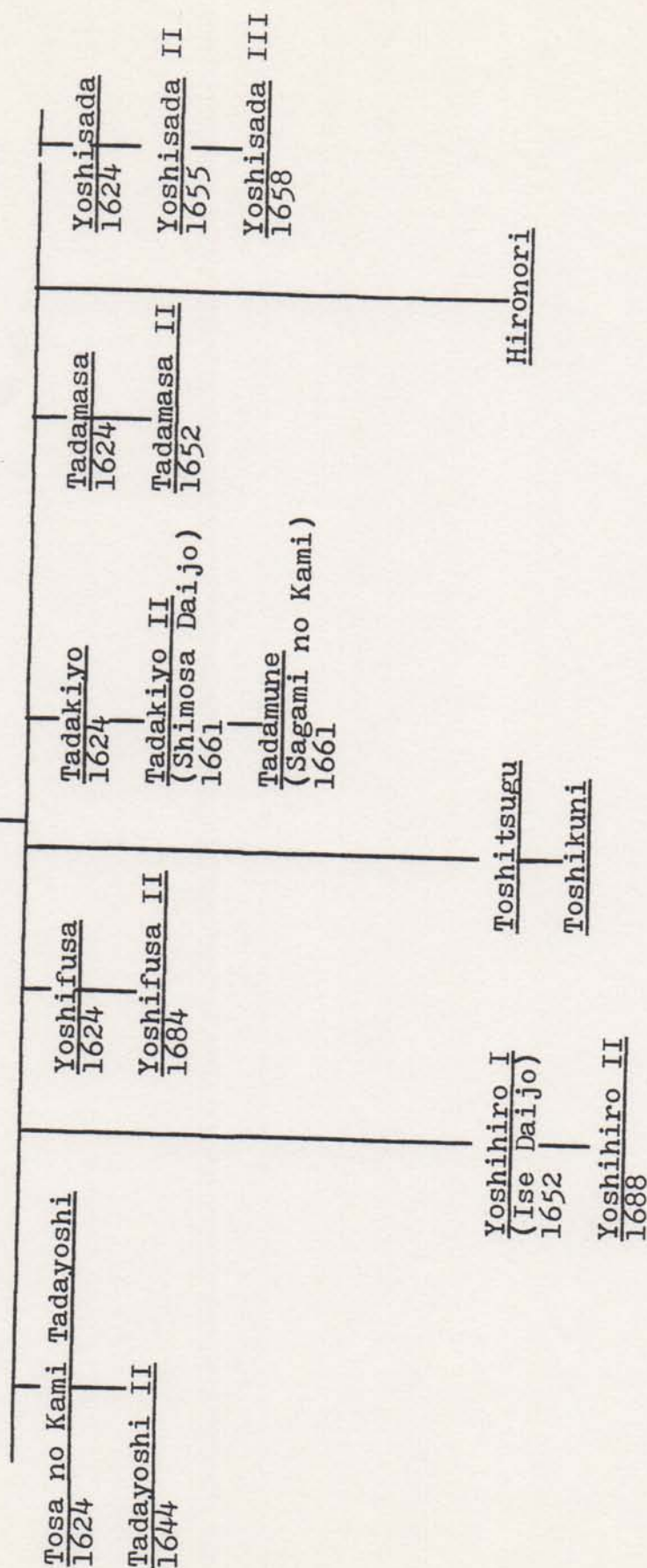
Stopped making swords in 1870. Unexceptional work.





GENEALOGY: COROLLARY FAMILY  
MASAHIRO, YUKIHIRO AND TADAKUNI FAMILIES

Shodai Tadayoshi



GENEALOGY:

STUDENTS OF SHODAI TADAYOSHI



#### EDITOR'S NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>The Nabeshima clan were "tozama," or outer daimyo; among those who were considered "outside" the Tokugawa camp. The tozama clans were the families who did not recognize the Tokugawa as their overlord before the battle of Sekigahara in 1600. The Nabeshima lands produced an officially estimated rice yield of 357,000 koku. One koku equals 4.96 bushels of rice. It was estimated that 5 koku was sufficient to support one man for a year; thus the Hizen province could, in theory, support 71,400 people. The Nabeshima were the eleventh largest daimyo by official standards.
- <sup>2</sup>Europeans were known as "Southern Barbarians" because they entered Japan from the South, not because of the actual location of their ports of origin.
- <sup>3</sup>The mission work of Francis Xavier began in Western Japan and in Kyoto in 1549. Initially the samurai viewed Christianity as another deviation of Buddhism. The Jesuits also demonstrated a great appreciation for the martial and philosophical training of the samurai. The drive for monetary gain also seems to have been a strong motive for both parties in establishing early relations.
- <sup>4</sup>The daimyo of the small Omura clan of Kyushu became Christians as early as 1562. The daimyo of the much larger Otomo received baptism in 1578. As a consequence, the Zen monks mounted a strong anti-Christian campaign in Kyushu. Hideyoshi finally banished all foreign missionaries from Japan in 1587. Christianity was eventually eradicated from Kyushu with the persecution of all known Japanese Christians.
- <sup>5</sup>The English pilot, Adams, became, in fact, the only non-Japanese to be given the status of a samurai by the Shogun. Will Adams is the basis for James Clavell's hero Blackthorne in his novel Shogun.
- <sup>6</sup>Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) was the founder and first shogun of the Tokugawa Shogunate. He was a leading general for both Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi in their efforts to unify Japan at the end of the Sengoku jidai (period of the nation at war). The three are considered the great unifiers of Japan. Ieyasu succeeded in establishing a shogunal government, the dream that eluded both Nobunaga and Hideyoshi. Ieyasu resigned as Shogun in 1603 and was succeeded by his third son, Hidetada,



already mature, thus preventing any struggle of succession. Though he took the status of a retired monk, Ieyasu continued to hold the reins of power. One year before his death, in 1615, he finally succeeded in destroying Hideyoshi's last heir, Hideyori, and establishing unquestionable control of Japan. Ieyasu's posthumous commands to his heirs, known as his legacy, became the basis for the code of Tokugawa law through its entire rule (1600-1866).

<sup>7</sup>The Shimabara Rebellion was led by a sixteen year old boy named Amakusa Shiro. His leadership had been prophesied among Japanese Christians for many years in a religious poem. His banner was a white field with a black Chalice between two angels in profile.

<sup>8</sup>It is generally accepted that the Dutch captain was courting the favor of the Tokugawa shogunate by firing on fellow Christians. The Dutch were involved in intense mercantile and colonial competition with the Spanish, Portuguese and English. The Spanish and Portuguese, as Roman Catholics, were considered enemies. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Japanese converts were really not considered co-religionists by the Protestant Dutch. The firing on Shimabara castle by the Dutch ship should not be considered unusual except that it is the only example of a European ship firing upon Japan.

<sup>9</sup>Beginning in 1616, all European ships were limited to Nagasaki and Hirato and in 1624 all relations with Spain were severed. A series of laws enacted between 1633 and 1639 limited foreign control even more. All Japanese were prohibited on pain of death from leaving Japan. Japanese ships were limited in size to coastal traders. Finally, the Portuguese were expelled for suspected complicity in the Shimabara Rebellion. All members of a Portuguese mission intending to reopen trade in 1640 were executed. Finally, the Dutch were confined in 1641 to Dejima, or Deshima, a man made island in Nagasaki harbor, and were treated like prisoners. The foreign trade of the Japanese remained virtually unchanged until the forceful intervention of the Buchanan administration.



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